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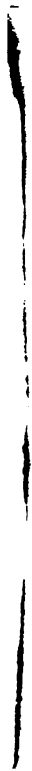
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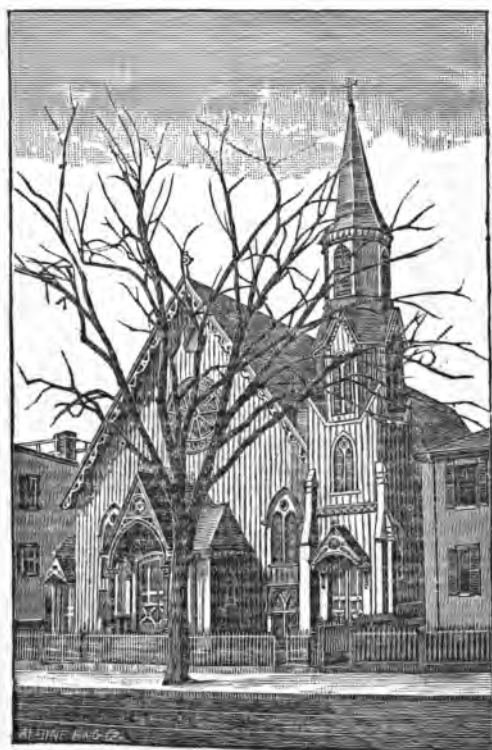
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Cover

III. 4353

HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF
St. Matthew's Church,
SOUTH BOSTON.





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The Growth of St. Matthew's Parish.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED ON

SUNDAY EVENING, JUNE 26, 1887,

IN ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH, SO. BOSTON,

BY

THE REV. JOHN WRIGHT,

AT THE CLOSE OF HIS RECTORSHIP.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE VESTRY.

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HISTORICAL DISCOURSE.

I ASK you at this time to take with me a backward look at the various stages through which our parish life has passed during nearly three quarters of a century. The review I am convinced will result in both thankfulness and encouragement.

The earliest record of St. Matthew's Church reads as follows: "South Boston, Sunday, March 31st, 1816, Divine service was performed this day in the Episcopal manner for the first time and a sermon read by Mr. Cotting in the school house." In this feeble and humble way, a little more than seventy-one years ago this parish began its existence. South Boston is referred to in the records as "the village," and the school house named was doubtless the only public school in the place. It was a small frame building located on G street, and did not accommodate more than seventy-five persons. Mr. Cotting was a lay reader, earnest and devoted, and the early successes of the Church were largely due to his efforts. The congregation gathered in the school house, ranged from ten to forty persons in number, and when the weather was inclement an adjournment was made to the house of Mr. Gould.

The first minister mentioned as having preached was the Rev. George S. White, who officiated on Sunday, May 12, 1816. The services for nearly three months were read, for on Sunday, June 23, we find this note, "Singing for the first

time this day." On Sunday, June 30, 1816, the Holy Communion was administered. There were twenty-one communicants, and the Rev. Asa Eaton of Christ Church officiated. This was not only the first commemoration of the Holy Communion in our Church, but its first celebration in South Boston.

A meeting was held May 31, 1816, at the house of Mr. Abraham Gould, to form a parish. It was at this time and place that the name of the Church "St. Matthew" was adopted. An act of incorporation was drawn up and received the signatures of thirty-five persons who were present and of six more afterward. A second meeting was held June 4, with an election of officers. Mr. Abraham Gould was chosen Senior Warden and Mr. Robert P. Williams Junior Warden. Messrs. Bell, Pronk, Brown, Dunham, Kupper and Johnson were elected Vestrymen. These were the first officers of the parish. It is recorded that Mr. Bell presented the Church with a \$5 Prayer Book, and a little later Hon. Thomas Dawes, Judge of Probate, presented a Bible valued at \$14. Mr. John R. Cotting, who had served the Church for nine months evidently without compensation, as a lay reader, was presented on Christmas day, 1816, with a suit of clothes costing \$38. The names of the donors, eight in number, are given, with the sums contributed.

At the Easter meeting held April 7, 1817, the subject of music was discussed, and it was finally voted to purchase a bass viol at the expense of \$16. The Vestry had, however, but \$10 in hand. In this dilemma the treasurer agreed to loan the additional \$6, and took a note for the same. It was voted to start a subscription to raise money to meet this note of \$6, and it was also resolved to start another subscription to pay a precentor for the two-fold purpose of leading the singing and playing the bass viol.

At a meeting held September 1, 1817, at the house of Mr. Josiah Dunham, it was decided to build a Church. Under the

same date we read, "A lot of land sixty feet square has been laid out on Abraham Gould's land. This afternoon the trenches for the Church were laid out, and Abraham Gould gave us to understand that the land would be paid for, or might be paid for, when the pews were sold." Two months later it was determined to build tombs under the Church and to sell them at auction. It appears that \$1000 had been borrowed to help erect the Church, but on November 5, 1817, a record of the vestry meeting says the carpenter suspended his work on account of a lack of funds. This led to the loan of \$600 and the work was resumed. On April 30th it was voted to purchase a pulpit and organ.

At last the hopes of the struggling congregation were realized, and June 24, 1818, on the festival of St. John the Baptist, the Church was consecrated by the Rt. Rev. Alex. V. Griswold. The following named clergymen were present and assisted in the services: The Rev. Dr. Gardner of Trinity Church, the Rev. Asa Eaton of Christ Church, the Rev. Mr. Kearney of New York, the Rev. J. Carlisle of Salem and the Rev. M. A. De Wolfe Howe, then a deacon, and now the Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. The infant parish was generously helped by the members of Christ and Trinity Churches. The Holy Communion vessels and baptismal bowl made of Britannia ware were presented by Christ Church, while the curtains of the gallery and the furnishings for the chancel were the gifts of Trinity Church. Mr. Charles Williams presented a Prayer Book, which is described as being in "2 volumes, in black morocco, gilt leaves." Aided by many friends the little Church was completed, at a total cost of \$6555.24. It was a quaint building, with a large pulpit and a curiously shaped chancel, as some of the older members of the congregation will remember.

A minute of the Vestry meeting held in the month of April, 1819, states that the selectmen of Boston granted the Church the use of a bell that had hung on Faneuil Hall. (At

that date Boston had not been incorporated as a city.) The bell was to serve a two-fold purpose, that of sounding fire alarms in South Boston as well as to call persons to Church. The bell was rung for the first time on May 14, 1819. It was in use as long as the building stood.

In these days it may sound novel to hear that the first Christmas sermon in the old Church was preached by a Congregational minister. The circumstances of the case are indicated by a note which reads, "It being the wish of several of the late hearers of Mr. T. M. Harris, Congregational minister of the adjoining parish in Dorchester that he should perform divine service in the Church, he was accordingly invited to perform the service with the restrictions imposed upon lay readers in the canons of the Church. His sermon was founded upon part of the prophecy of Zachariah."

Our Church in its early days seems to have had a great struggle to keep out of financial embarrassment, and the good people evidently heard much of that familiar expression "current expenses." Thus we read that at a meeting held December 20, 1819, it was decided to place an extra tax on the pews to raise funds. It was voted to tax the pews on the lower floor two cents a Sunday, and the pews in the gallery one cent a Sunday.

The services of the Church were for some time in charge of Mr. Addison Searle, a lay reader. He seems to have devoted himself to the work without moneyed remuneration, for when he retired from the position this note was put upon the records: "It was voted that R. P. Williams be a committee to present the thanks of this Church to Mr. Searle for his past services, and say that had our resources allowed it we should have been happy to have given him something better than thanks." Mr. Searle was succeeded by Mr. R. G. Parker, who in turn was followed by another lay reader, Mr. Theodore Edson, who became ultimately the rector of St. Ann's Church, Lowell. What he had to depend upon may be inferred

from this record: "A box has been placed in the entry of the Church with a hole in the lid for the reception of voluntary contributions from the worshippers instead of other taxes, with a view of remunerating Mr. Theodore Edson the reader." It is recorded August 19, 1821, that ladies of St. Paul's parish had presented St. Matthew's Church with a surplice. According to a minute made May 2, 1828, it appears that the Church was in possession of an elegant glass chandelier presented by Mr. Thomas Cains. Also that both an organ and a choir master had been secured at a cost of \$100 per year. The Sunday School was closed during the winter months, but when the scholars came together at Easter, 1828, thirty children were present.

The first rector of the Church was the Rt. Rev. Alex. V. Griswold, elected in 1816. He was followed the Rev. J. L. Blake. He acted for a time as missionary, but was elected rector in 1824. How weak the Church was and how much of an effort it cost the rector to sustain the parish, is indicated in the accounts of the Vestry meetings. Thus in 1827 we find the treasurer authorized to "reimburse the amount expended by the Rev. J. L. Blake towards the warming of the Church from the funds now on hand." What he had to depend upon for salary may be imagined from a resolution of April 2, 1829: "Voted, that after settling the outstanding debts of the Church, what remains over in the hands of the treasurer be paid to the reverend rector for his services." Think of ministers in these days getting nothing for their support save what was left after Church expenses had been paid! It was not until 1830 that we read that the Rev. Mr. Blake received a stated salary, he being then voted \$500 per annum. In 1831 the Church was repaired and enlarged. On the first Sunday after Trinity, June 24, 1832, the Rev. Mr. Blake announced that his connection with the parish had terminated.

August 5, 1832, the Rev. M. A. De Wolfe Howe began his services in the Church, being called to officiate for three

months, for which he was to receive \$100. August 9, 1832, was a day of fasting and prayer, appointed on account of the ravages of cholera. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Stone, rector of St. Paul's Church.

The Vestry, April 5, 1834, invited the Rev. E. M. P. Wells to officiate for one year. This clergyman had officiated at times before this, for the first record he makes of his services bears date February 2, 1834. He severed his connection with the Church at Easter, 1835. In the Record Book he left these lines in his own writing: "Easter Day, Mr. Wells administered the communion A. M. and preached his last sermon officially P. M. O God bless this Church." For this year of service he received \$200. In those days a little money was forced to accomplish much. We find it recorded that the sexton was paid \$50 a year, the organist \$35, and a young lady who had sung very acceptably for \$10 per annum was voted \$6 more for another year.

In 1835 the Rev. Horace L. Conolly was called to the rectorship at a salary of \$500. He was advanced to the priesthood in St. Matthew's Church July 29, 1835. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. Wainwright. The Rev. Messrs. Millet, Mead, Blake and the Rev. Dr. Wainwright assisted Bishop Griswold in the imposition of hands. In the afternoon of the same day the Rev. Mr. Conolly was instituted Rector, receiving the keys of the Church from the Senior Warden, Dr. Stebbins. At Easter, 1838, Rev. Mr. Conolly resigned his rectorship.

In the same year the Rev. Joseph H. Clinch was extended a call at \$500 per year. He was instituted September 23, 1838. The Rev. Joel Clapp of Maine, the Rev. N. W. Monroe of Mississippi, the Rev. E. M. P. Wells and Bishop Griswold were present. The keys of the Church were presented by the Senior Warden, Mr. Samuel Huddleston. The work of the parish expanded, and April, 1853, the salary of the rector was increased to \$1000. In the month of December, 1854, it

was decided to discontinue the Christmas Eve services which had been held a long time. For a number of years the records of the parish showed much agitation of opinion concerning the expediency of using the tombs under the Church. In 1855 it appears that the effort to have them closed was successful.

On March 17, 1860, the Rev. Mr. Clinch presented his letter of resignation, after an honorable and faithful service of nearly a quarter of a century. The regret of the parish was expressed by the following report made to the Vestry :

"Whereas the Rev. Joseph H. Clinch, for twenty-two years rector of this parish, has sent to the Wardens and Vestry his resignation of the office, therefore,

Resolved, That in justice to Mr. Clinch but with deep regret we accept his resignation.

Resolved, That we cannot allow this separation to be consummated without placing on record some expression of our grateful recognition of his long-continued and self-denying labors on behalf of this parish and this community and of our high appreciation of the intellectual ability and scholarship, the purity of doctrine, the faithfulness and fervency which have distinguished his public ministrations, as well as the Christian graces exhibited in his daily life among us and of the kind and incessant solicitude with which he has cared for the sick, the dying, the afflicted and the destitute.

Resolved, That these resolutions be placed upon the records of the parish, and that a copy of them be transmitted to Mr. Clinch with the assurance that we shall ever cherish toward him, wherever in his Master's vineyard he may be called to labor, feelings of the most respectful and affectionate regard."

The resolutions were ordered to be published in the Christian Witness, the Church paper of those days. Dr. Clinch, after his resignation, continued to reside in this vicinity, with his time occupied as Chaplain of the House of Correction and as Secretary of the Diocesan Convention. The degree of S.T.D., conferred upon him by Columbia College, was a deserved honor, for he was a clear thinker and a man of ripe scholarship. He was a diligent student of the Bible, reading it daily in its original tongues. He bequeathed to me his well worn Greek Testament, a gift which I shall treasure with the

tenderest care through life. On the morning of Saturday, July 5, 1884, his gentle spirit entered upon the joys of the "life immortal." Most of you will remember how a sorrowing congregation gathered within these walls, with the Bishop and several of the other clergy of the Diocese, to pay the last tribute of respect to the memory of this man of God. The tablet placed upon the wall of the chancel was a fitting tribute of affection, but he lives in the imperishable hearts of those to whom he ministered in holy things. These are his monuments.

In the year 1860 the Rev. Frederick Wilson was elected rector. Of his term of service, which fell something short of a year, we have but scanty records. He was an eloquent preacher and large congregations were drawn to hear him. It was during his ministry that the property which we now occupy was purchased. The lot is described as being 70 feet wide by 145 feet long, and the cost 80 cents per foot, payable in eight or ten years. The present Church was erected on part of the lot, but remained in debt for some time. The building Committee were Messrs. David Clapp, Thomas Hill, Edward H. Brainard, James Wood and William W. Allen. The building is gothic in architecture, and originally seated 450 persons. The last service in the old Church was held December 16, 1860, and the first service in the new one the next Sunday, December 23. The Rev. Mr. Wilson, at his resignation in June, 1861, returned to England. The old Church was sold to the Masonic Fraternity in 1860, and a few years later was torn down. Other buildings have been erected upon the site, and the only reminder of its existence is a little street known as Church Avenue, which extends from Broadway below E street.

In November, 1861, the Rev. J. I. T. Coolidge was called to the rectorship.

By 1865 the Church had made such progress that it was free from debt. It was consecrated on the 11th of May of

that year by Rt. Rev. Manton Eastburn. The Rev. Messrs. Clinch, Mills, and Converse read the morning service, the Rev. Mr. Washburn the Epistle, and the Rev. Dr. Huntington the sentence of consecration.

August 10, 1866, the Church building was closed for enlargement, and the services were held in the E Street Congregational Church for three months. It was re-opened November 4, forty-six pews having been added, giving a seating capacity of 650, and the little chapel was added to the vestry room. The present tower was erected, with a new bell, made in part from the old one, a gift of friends of the Rector in Boston and Providence. The bell has the following inscriptions: "Cast by Henry N. Hooper & Co., Boston, 1866." "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The ladies of the Parish also furnished the chancel with new and appropriate furniture. February 4, 1867, a new organ (the one now in use) first assisted in the regular musical services of the Church. The Rev. Dr. Coolidge resigned in 1873.

On Sunday, February 1, 1874, I began my ministry in this parish, and I end it to-night after a rectorship of thirteen years and five months. I call your attention to the fact that the combined years of service given to this Church by the Rev. Dr. Clinch, the Rev. Dr. Coolidge and myself foot up forty-seven years. I say this to your credit, for there are very few parishes in our changeful land that have had only three rectors in forty-seven years.

Of the events that have taken place during my rectorate I need not speak minutely, as they are so recent as to be familiar to you. I can simply say in passing that when I came here I found a debt of \$5000, which was paid off in a year. I also found the parish without accommodations for the Sunday School and various societies. In 1877 the present large lecture room with other working rooms were added at a cost of \$5000, which were paid for. In 1885 the walls of the Church were

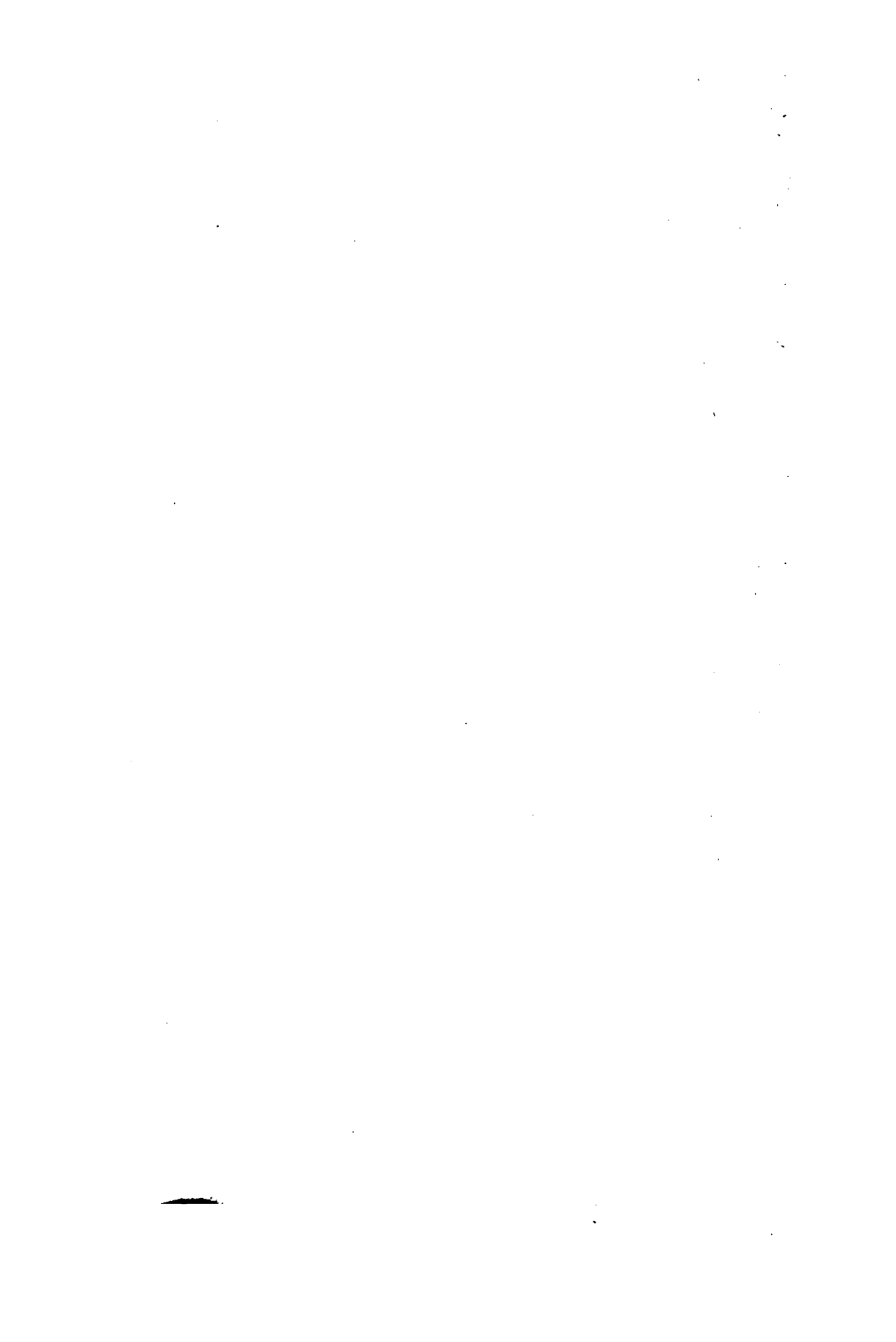
newly frescoed and otherwise ornamented, which work has also been paid for, and I now leave the Church without a debt of any kind.

When I came to South Boston the only other Episcopal congregation here met in an upper room on Broadway near C street, known as St. Stephen's Chapel. It next removed to the corner of D and Silver streets, and finally was taken out of South Boston to Tyler street. Two other mission chapels have had their origin since my ministry began here, and both of them in a humble way from members of this parish. I have lived to see these organizations expand until they have substantial and churchly buildings of their own, the one Grace Church and the other the Church of the Redeemer. These two parishes to-night have closed their doors and have come here to unite with the Mother Church in this closing service. This is a touching tribute to me which I deeply appreciate and acknowledge.

During the years of my ministry here this part of the city has increased twenty thousand in population. This has brought a very great expansion of the general work of the parish, and consequently my official duties have been numerous. I have officiated at 1026 baptisms, 266 marriages, 541 funerals, and I have presented 481 persons for confirmation. The total number of services has reached 5340. I have had at different times four assistant ministers who are now doing good work in other parishes, and who were thankful for their experiences in St. Matthew's: the Rev. Dr. Chambré of Lowell, the Rev. Thomas Nickerson of Rochdale, the Rev. Frederick W. Dennis of Florence, Italy, and the Rev. Alfred F. Washburn of City Point. I have been also helped by twelve lay readers. Of this number six have gone into the ministry, and one other is about to begin his theological studies. This parish has shaped the lives of not a few of the clergy.

We have seen in this review of the history of our Church how weak was its beginning, and how it has struggled through

many difficulties until it has reached a comparatively strong position. We should find in these things encouragement for the future. Our Church is located on the principal thoroughfare of this part of the city. Places of trade have not only encroached upon our borders but gone beyond them. The time is coming when these lots must be sold for business purposes, and the proceeds will be a generous help toward building a substantial Church in a more suitable location. There is not a dollar of debt, so that the way is clear, under the enthusiasm of a new rector, for progress and development. I cannot wish anything better for him than the support, the sympathy, the tenderness and the kindness you have given me. The thirteen years of my rectorship have passed peacefully and happily. Our relationships have been those of brethren in Christ. I shall always be grateful that I had the privilege of associating with the workers of our parochial societies, with the young people of the Rector's Bible class, with the children of the Sunday school and Church Home, with the members of the Chorus Choir who have sung so long and so faithfully, and with the white robed singers, the men and the lads who have consecrated their voices to God in the service of song. In conclusion, I can in all sincerity repeat the language of St. Paul to the Philippians, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."





ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH IN 1843.

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ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH IN 1843.

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